

[Subway Stuff]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [?] Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Sidney Ascher

ADDRESS 434 E. 98 St. Brooklyn, N. Y.

DATE November 23, 1938

SUBJECT SUBWAY STUFF: FOLKTALK

1. Date and time of interview November 21
2. Place of interview I. R. T. Subway (New Lots Line)
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

Library of Congress

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SUBJECT SUBWAY STUFF: FOLKTALK

A trip in the city's subways may, if one is so inclined, prove to be more educational than a college course in psychology; more entertaining than a good motion picture and more dramatic than Uncle Tom's Cabin. It is reasonable to suppose that since New York City is a melting pot of all types and nationalities, an alert observer may, if he wishes, obtain an absorbing cross-section of the life, loves, happiness and sorrows of the New Yorker.

During the morning rush hour (from about seven to nine) one sees people rushing madly about to get on a train as if there will not be another for at least an hour! As a matter of fact, during rush hours, trains are run on a one minute schedule. The New Yorker is fully aware of this but he still insists on crowding into a train until he loses his individuality and becomes merely one of the "tightly packed sardines in a car that lacks only the oil to make the illusion complete."

After nine o'clock and until about two in the afternoon we find housewives going downtown to see if the stores have any "specials" or else to attend a "bargain matinee."

At three o'clock the trains become filled with homeward bound students. The noisy pupils are either straphanging, indulging in a 2 bit of horseplay or heckling the conductor, but regardless of what they say it is at the top of their lungs. Infrequently some are to be found actually reading a text book.

After four o'clock the trains become jammed with workers who are going home. And just as much as they hurried to get to work, so do they shove madly into a train to get home.

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After six-thirty, the trains are occupied by recreation seekers. The same wild, crowding rushing New Yorker out to play but this time he proceeds at a slower pace. Some are bound for a movie, others to night school, a show, meeting, concert or lecture. And so until after midnight when the trains take on a new class of passengers. The night worker, that individual who lives an abnormal life, who works while the city sleeps. It may be noted that he does not rush to work. Men and women hurrying home so that they may get a few hours sleep before beginning their daily workout on the morning train. Toward dawn [?] there is a lull. The passengers are sleepy individuals, drunks, and homeless. And so on it goes, day after day.

Two Jewish girls, (with little education as their conversation seemed to prove) about nineteen years of age were discussing their "dates" of the night before.

One was slender, with nice features, and a clean, clear complexion, that is, it might be clean were it not for the fact that her face was struggling under an over-generous coating of powder and rouge. Her eyebrows were tweezed to a thin tapering line, and for her beautiful eyelashes credit must go to some false eyelash manufacturer. Her thin lips were smattered with a thick layer of purple (Ye gods!) lipstick. Her beautiful black hair was dressed in "page boy" style, 3 and she wore a black sport hat with a long feather, and a plain black box coat. The second girl was about the same height as her companion, five feet three inches. She was pleasingly (?) plump, around 150 lbs, and was also disguised with a poor paint job which she must have deemed so vital. In addition, she was also the possessor of a moustache which peeped through faintly in spite of an obvious application of peroxide or some other hair lightener.

Miss Moustache is speaking, "Yeh, I had some lousy time last night. I thing he's a fag. [Wheredoyuh?] think he took me? Yeh, we went to a Broadway show but was that lousy. What was it about? It was so stupid. I didn't even know what it was about myself. Some old

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man gets another man up in a tree and then he puts a fence around it so he couldn't get out. It was so dumb. All the time the man was in the tree nobody could die. If that wasn't dumb I don' know what is. I would rather want to see Tobacco Road. Sadie told me they talk right out plain in Tobacco Road. It's a wonder it wasn't raided Sadie said. (The show Miss Moustache described so brilliantly was "On Borrowed Time," one of the season's biggest hits.) You think my Mother raised crazy children? Sure we ate. He said he wanted to go to the Automatic to eat just for the fun of it. I gave him fun. I'm wise to that baloney. We went to Chin and Lees. After we ate, he took me home. Yeh, and he lives all the way in the Bronx. Yeh, I think he's faggy. Whatta think— he didn't event try to kiss me good-night. So what if it's the foist time we went out—maybe I wouldn't of let him kiss me but he coulda tried. No, he didn't ask me for another date. I think he's a fag. Say whatta 'bout you . ? Where didja go?

Miss Purple Lipstick replied, "Oh, we just went to the chinks, and to the movies. "We saw "If I was King." Gee, that Ronald Colman, can he kiss! He can put his shoes under my bed anytime. It was one 4 of them custom pictures. No. Frances Dee was the girl in the picture. She looked so pretty. She has a long face. Didja ever notice? Gee, they way they push around in this train. I hadda use my hatpin yesterday. Some wiseguy had hand trouble. They oughta have special trains for women. Somebody slit my girl friend's coat last week with a razor blade or somethin'. She didn't even know it was cut until she got off the train. They oughta catch the louse who does them things. I'm changin' at Utica, Rosalind. Will I see you tonight? Come over to my house, I'll letcha do my nails. So Long.

(Two girls— First Miss—)

Gee whiz, it gets worst every morning. If I ever quit my job its gonna be because of the crush in the trains. By the time I get to work I'm knocked out. I'd work for a couple of dollars lest if I could get a Brooklyn job. You know, I'm sorry I couldn't meet you las' night.

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It was like this—when I got home I was so tired that I taught I'd take 25 winks—so I laid down on the couch and woke up it was ten o'clock— so what did I do? I got undressed and went to bed, and like a dope I couldn't sleep all night. So maybe it wasn't so smart to take the 25 winks. Was it a good picture?

(Second Miss)

It's good you didn't go. I dun't like dese silly pichures. The Ritz Brothers are awful silly. I liked the oder pichure, "The Lady Objects," see det pichure learns yuh somethin'. It was refeened. It shows how you can't have your husband and a good job both at the same time. If I get a man with a decent job he should make his thirty-five dollars a week steady, I'd give up my job—no career for me.

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(Girl to man who is reading her paper over her shoulder.)

If you want I should give you this paper, so so—I wouldn't want you to strain your eyes. You wouldn't think of taking my paper, so alright, don't be reading it with me. I'm not being sarcastic but if you haven't two cents to buy a paper for yourself I'm sorry for you. Some nerve, you wouldn't buy the Mirror!

Two men shabbily dressed, one, the speaker is in need of a shave, and haircut, they are about thirty years of age....

Just think, I'da had a couple hundred bucks this morning if it hadn't been for my lousy brother-in-law. Aw, he's an awful louse louse . Saturday in the shop I got a tip on a horse and nobody wanted to lend me money to place a bet. I went to my lousy brother-in-law and asked him to go partners with me. So what think, the skunk he asts for security. Whatta nut. Didja ever hear of getting security when you bet on a nag? So, he didn't wanna go

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partners and he wouldn't lend me the money. So I ate my heart out when the nag pulled in to win and paid \$57. I coulda kilt my lousy brother-in-law. When I tole him the horse won—he said he was glad he didn't bet because if he woulda won he mighta been encouraged to bet again, and then before he knows he'd be losing a lotta money. Some louse.

Miss Purple Lipstick of a previous “subway stuff” tale is taling talking to a young man——

Say, what happened to your friend Jack, did he drop dead? He hasn't come around to see my girl friend for a week. I heard she's in love with him. Anyway he's got a hell of a nerve. [Haveyuh gottapiece?] of gum. He makes a date with her. That's why we came down to the club.

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She was all dressed up and there he is in a polo shirt. Is that the right thing to do? Where can you go in a polo shirt?

A shabbily dressed middle aged man carrying a carton——

Laydees and Gentlemen—A very famous stationary manufacturer whose name is so big that if I were to mention it, you'd know immediately who I mean—has his warehouses overstocked and that's why I'm selling these mechanical pencils and notebook sets at less than the cost of manufacture. I have to clean out the warehouses. Yes, siree, this beautiful pencil and notebook is made in America by American union labor. I'm selling the set for one dime. The pencil expels, repels and mis-spells, hah, hah. Who else wants one of these beautiful sets? Bring one home for the kiddies. Have one in your office. Buy one,

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buy a dozen. Ten cents a set, and as an extra special for today only—ten sets for one dollar.